



INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)

1. THE FORMATION OF IORA

Highlighting the importance of economic co-operation between the countries bordering the Indian Ocean, the vision for IORA originated during a visit by late President Nelson Mandela of the Republic of South Africa to India in 1995, where he said: *“The natural urge of the facts of history and geography ... should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean Rim for socio-economic co-operation and other peaceful endeavours. Recent changes in the international system demand that the countries of the Indian Ocean shall become a single platform.”*

This sentiment and rationale underpinned the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative (IORI) in March 1995, and the creation in March 1997 of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation (IOR-ARC), as IORA was then called.

Today, IORA is the apex regional organization of 23 Member States and 12 Dialogue Partners, stretching from South Africa in the west, running up the eastern coast of Africa, along the Gulf to South and Southeast Asia, ending with Australia in the east.

This year (2024) will mark the 27th anniversary of the Association.

2. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

In March 1995 officials, business people and academics from seven countries - Australia, India, Kenya, Mauritius, the Sultanate of Oman, Singapore and South Africa – met to discuss how to promote economic cooperation in the Indian Ocean Rim region. This group, subsequently referred to as the "core group states" or M-7, issued a joint statement declaring that they had agreed on: "Principles of open regionalism and inclusivity of membership, with the objectives of trade liberalization and promoting trade co-operation. Activities would focus on trade facilitation, promotion and liberalization of trade, investment promotion and economic co-operation."

The next meeting in September 1996 finalised a Charter for the creation of IORA, and expanded the membership to include Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Tanzania, Madagascar and Mozambique, also known as the M-14.

The Charter establishing the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation was adopted by Resolution in the first Ministerial Meeting in Port Louis, Mauritius on 7 March 1997; reviewed in the tenth Meeting of the Council of Ministers in Sana'a, Yemen in 2010; amended in the fourteenth Meeting of the Council of Ministers in Perth in 2014 following the new name of the Association as the "Indian Ocean Rim Association" (IORA); and amended in the eighteenth Meeting of the Council of Ministers in Durban in 2018.

3. IORA'S OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Association are:

- To promote sustainable growth and balanced development of the region and Member States;
- To focus on those areas of economic co-operation which provide maximum opportunities for development, shared interest and mutual benefits; and,
- To promote liberalisation, remove impediments and lower barriers towards a freer and enhanced flow of goods, services, investment, and technology within the Indian Ocean rim.

These objectives are underpinned by the principle of open regionalism.

4. BASIS OF CO-OPERATION

The Charter declares that IORA seeks to build and expand understanding and mutually beneficial co-operation through a consensus based, evolutionary and non-intrusive approach. There are no laws and binding contracts. All decisions are based on consensus.

Co-operation is based on principles of sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, political independence, and non-interference in internal affairs of Member States, peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit.

The IORA Charter explicitly excludes bilateral and other issues likely to generate controversy that become obstacles or impediments to regional co-operation. Co-operation within the Association does not prejudice the rights and obligations of the Member States within the framework of other economic and trade co-operation arrangements. It does not seek to be a substitute, but tries to reinforce, be complementary to and consistent with, the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral rights and obligations of Member States, in line with an open regionalism approach.

5. MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to all sovereign states of the Indian Ocean Rim willing to subscribe to the principles and objectives of the Charter.

The current 23 Member States are: Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, France/Reunion, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. IORA also has 11 Dialogue Partners: China, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The Association has two Specialised Agencies: The Regional Centre for Science and Technology Transfer (RCSTT) based in Tehran, Iran; and the Fisheries Support Unit (FSU) based in Muscat, Oman; and has two observers, the Indian Ocean Research Group (IORG) and the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA).

6. LEADERSHIP OF IORA

The Council of Ministers elects the Chair of the Association for a period of two years. This is based on the voluntary offer by Member States to become the Chair or; if there is no voluntary offer, the Chair will be elected based on geographical consideration.

| CHAIR | YEAR |
|--|-----------|
| Republic of Mauritius | 1997-1998 |
| Republic of Mozambique | 1999-2000 |
| Sultanate of Oman | 2001-2002 |
| Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka | 2003-2005 |
| Islamic Republic of Iran | 2006-2008 |
| Republic of Yemen | 2009-2010 |
| Republic of India | 2011-2012 |
| Commonwealth of Australia | 2013-2014 |
| Republic of Indonesia | 2015-2017 |
| Republic of South Africa | 2017-2019 |
| United Arab Emirates | 2019-2021 |
| People's Republic of Bangladesh (Past) | 2021-2023 |
| Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (Current) | 2023-2025 |

7. STRUCTURE

IORA's apex body is the Council of (Foreign) Ministers (COM) that meets annually. A Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) meets bi-annually to review and prioritise IORA's activities. The Association has Functional Bodies which strengthen and promote activities in the Association and are governed by their Terms of Reference (TOR) as recommended by the CSO and approved by the COM. The current functional bodies are:

- a) Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group (IORAG)
- b) Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum (IORBF)
- c) Working Group on Trade and Investment (WGTI)
- d) Working Group on Women's Economic Empowerment (GWEE)
- e) Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security (WGMSS)
- f) Working Group on Disaster Risk Management (WGDRM)
- g) Working Group on the Blue Economy (WGBE)
- h) Working Group on Science Technology and Innovation (WGSTI)
- i) Core Group on Tourism (CGT)
- j) Core Group on Fisheries Management (CGFM)

8. SECRETARIAT

The IORA Secretariat is located in Mauritius and is headed by Secretary-General, H.E. Salman Al Farisi. He is currently supported by the Management Team comprising of the following:

- a) Mr. Rajib Tripura, Director (Secondment from Bangladesh)
- b) Ms. Amanda Aspden, Director (Secondment from Australia)
- c) Ms. Rina Setyawati, Director (Secondment from Indonesia)
- d) Ms. Zelda Vrolick (Secondment from South Africa)
- e) Mr. Alex Mpangala, Corporate Service Manager (Secondment from Tanzania)
- f) Mrs. Sagri Sharma, ICT Adviser (Secondment from India)
- g) Ms. Melyne Tarer, Blue Economy Expert (Secondment from France)

The IORA Secretariat has thirteen (13) local staff that support the Secretary-General and the seconded Directors.

9. BUDGET

The annual budget of the Secretariat is based on annual membership contributions by the Member States.

10. SPECIAL FUND

The IORA Special Fund was established by the Council of Ministers in its meeting held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 2004. The Special Fund is a financial mechanism for supporting and complementing the funding of projects and programmes adopted by the Association, in line with the principles and objectives enshrined in the Charter as well as the objectives and goals envisaged by the relevant organs of the Organisation.

The principal objectives of the Special Fund are as follows:

- to assist with the provision of funds needed for the implementation of projects and programmes;
- to assist with the preparation of projects;
- to assist with the provision of technical assistance for preparation and/or implementation of projects;
- to assist with pre-feasibility and feasibility project studies.

11. CONSOLIDATION OF IORA

Since 2011, there has been a growing direction and determination to strengthen institutions and capacities within IORA. Six Priority Areas were identified during India's period as Chair (2011-2013):

- Maritime Safety and Security (MSS);
- Fisheries Management (FM);
- Academic, Science and Technology Co-operation (ASTC);
- Trade and Investment Facilitation (TIF);
- Disaster Risk Management (DRM);
- Tourism and Cultural Exchanges (TCE).

Australia, during its period as Chair, (2013 – 2015), sustained the momentum through sharpening IORA's strategic focus with the adoption of two cross-cutting issues; the Blue Economy and Women's Economic Empowerment. Recommendations were made for ensuring that IORA is better placed to work on these priority areas. The recommendations included the reorganisation of the agenda items based on the six Priority Areas, format of reports, among others. The Association changed its name from the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation (IOR-ARC) to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), signifying this renewed vigour in the work of the Association.

Indonesia's period as Chair (2015 – 2017) coincided with the Association's 20th anniversary and to mark this occasion, the first IORA Leaders' Summit was held in Jakarta on 7 March

2017. The Summit's adoption and signing of "The Jakarta Concord" elevated the Association's profile and stature to a significantly higher level and charted the way forward for the Association.

The Jakarta Concord provides the highest levels of commitment to ensuring that the Indian Ocean is a region of peace, stability and development through enhanced co-operation, including, but not limited to, the six priority areas and cross-cutting issues. The Jakarta Concord was accompanied by the five-year IORA Action Plan (2017-2021) which provides a firm set of realistic and measurable commitments for the IORA Council of Ministers to implement the Jakarta Concord and take IORA forward in a more outcome orientated manner. An IORA Action Plan was also adopted setting short-, medium- and long-term goals in each of IORA's Priority Areas.

The IORA Business Summit hosted by Indonesia in March 2017 also served to highlight the tremendous economic potential of IORA, including through a Joint Declaration to Build Partnerships for a Sustainable and Equitable Economic Growth (7 March 2017).

South Africa's view as Chair was that the Indian Ocean Region should be characterised as a region of peace, stability and development within which to pursue the goal of promoting (economic) co-operation for the wellbeing and development of the countries and peoples of the Indian Ocean Rim. To this end, South Africa adopted the following theme as Chair from 2017 – 2019: "IORA – uniting the peoples of Africa, Asia, Australasia, and the Middle East through enhanced co-operation for peace, stability and sustainable development".

During South Africa's Chair of IORA the Charter was revised and progress realised in implementing the IORA Action Plan (2017-2021) such as through: (i) the establishment of new Working Groups on the Blue Economy, Maritime Safety and Security, and Women's Economic Empowerment, as well as the Core Group on Tourism; (ii) Workshop to strengthen the IORA Secretariat; and (iii) the deepening and broadening of Dialogue Partners' involvement in and support for IORA through the adopted of the "Declaration on Guidelines for Enhancing Interaction with Dialogue Partners". South Africa also launched the Nelson Mandela "Be the Legacy" Internship Programme (NMIP).

During United Arab Emirates (UAE)'s Chair under the theme of "Promoting a Shared Destiny and Path to Prosperity in the Indian Ocean", UAE prioritized the improvement of IORA's governance structures and guidelines in an effort to meet the standards befitting the paramount multilateral organization within the Indian Ocean region. Crucially, manuals were drafted to ensure clear procedures, processes and expectations were set for the work of the Secretariat. It has to be noted that UAE's Chairship coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and with the onset of the global pandemic, IORA Member States were faced with unprecedented health and economic challenges. In order to maintain momentum within its cooperative agenda, the Chair moved IORA meetings online, bringing Member States together to discuss and implement measures to alleviate hardships being experienced across the region.

Bangladesh chaired IORA for 2021-2023 period that started at the 21st Meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM) held in Djaka on 17th November 2021. Bangladesh's theme for its two-year period as Chair was "Harnessing the opportunities of the Indian Ocean Sustainably for Inclusive Development". Bangladesh strongly focusses on the implementation and strengthening institutional issues specially development issues. The Special Fund mechanism is not mandated and enabled to initiate and implement large-scale developmental projects for Members States. In this regard, Bangladesh has initiated to establish the IORA Development Initiative – a mechanism that makes funding available for short, medium and long term developmental projects under IORA in the region. Member States have endorsed the Concept of the Initiative. Bangladesh also proposed Climate Change to be a cross-cutting issue of IORA. Climate Change now is an integrated part of IORA Agenda.

12. CURRENT CHAIR

Sri Lanka assumed the position of Chair of IORA at the 23rd Meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM) held in Colombo on 11th October 2023 under the theme "Strengthening Regional Architecture: Reinforcing Indian Ocean identity" for the period of 2023-2025. India assumed the position of Vice-Chair for that period.

13. HIGH-LEVEL IORA EVENTS/ DECLARATIONS

Sectoral Ministerial events

- a) Third Ministerial Blue Economy Conference (BEC-III), 4-5 September 2019, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- b) Second IORA Tourism Ministerial Meeting, 21-23 October 2018, Nelson Mandela Bay, Eastern Cape, South Africa
- c) Second IORA Renewable Energy Ministerial Meeting, 2-4 October 2018, Delhi NCR, India
- d) First IORA Ministerial Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment – A Pre-requisite for Sustainable Development, 28-29 August 2018, Balaclava, Mauritius
- e) Second Ministerial Blue Economy Conference (BEC-II), 8-10 May 2017, Indonesia
- f) Second Economic and Business Conference (EBC-II), 11-13 April 2016, Dubai
- g) First IORA Ministerial Blue Economy Conference (BEC-I), 2-3 September 2015, Mauritius
- h) First IORA Tourism Ministerial Meeting, 20-21 November 2014, Seychelles
- i) First Meeting of the Renewable Energy Ministerial Forum of IORA, 21 January 2014, UAE
- j) First Ministerial Economic and Business Conference (EBC-I), 4-5 July 2013, Mauritius

14. IORA Ministerial Declarations

- a) Dhaka Declaration on the Blue Economy, 5 September 2019, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- b) Special Declaration on The Commemoration of the Centenary of the Birth of Nelson Mandela, Durban, South Africa, 2 November 2018
- c) Declaration on Guidelines for Enhancing Interaction with Dialogue Partners in IORA, Durban, South Africa, 2 November 2018
- d) Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism Declaration for the Establishment of the IORA Tourism Core Group, Eastern Cape, South Africa, 23 October 2018
- e) Declaration on Renewable Energy in the Indian Ocean Region, New Delhi, India, 4 October 2018
- f) Balaclava Declaration on Women's Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality as a Pre-Requisite for Sustainable Development, Balaclava, Mauritius, 29 August 2018
- g) Declaration on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, Jakarta, Indonesia, 7 March 2017
- h) Declaration on Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment, Bali, Indonesia, 27 October 2016
- i) IORA Maritime Co-operation Declaration, Padang, Indonesia, 23 October 2015
- j) Mauritius Declaration on the Blue Economy, Mauritius, 3 September 2015
- k) Seychelles Tourism Declaration, Seychelles, 21 November 2014
- l) IORA Economic Declaration, Perth, Australia, 9 October 2014
- m) Abu Dhabi Declaration of the First Indian Ocean Renewable Energy Ministerial Forum, Abu Dhabi, 21 January 2014
- n) Declaration of the Indian Ocean Rim Association on the Principles for Peaceful, Productive and Sustainable Use of the Indian Ocean and its Resources, Perth, Australia, 1 November 2013.

15. SPECIAL PROGRAMMES

15.1 IORA Sustainable Development Programme (ISDP)

IORA introduced the IORA Sustainable Development Programme (ISDP) at the CSO meeting held in Perth in 2014 as an instrument of development to strengthen the capacities of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in IORA and foster regional co-operation and forge new partnership with IORA Member States especially with a focus on employment generation and poverty alleviation.

The ISDP allows for access to the IORA Special Fund through a special arrangement for the LDC Member States with much of the organisation and logistics of the event being managed by the Secretariat in consultation with the hosting Member State.

The ISDP was launched in 2015 with the first event held in April in Bangladesh followed by Tanzania in the same month.

15.2 Somalia and Yemen Development Programme (SYDP)

The Secretariat also launched a new initiative for capacity building for Somalia and Yemen and which was endorsed at the 18th meeting of the CSO that was held in Bali on 25-26 October 2016. The first SYDP, focusing on Banking and Artisanal Fisheries, was hosted by the United Arab Emirates, on 13-14 August 2017, in Abu Dhabi. The Second SYDP Workshop on Improving the Quality and Value of Fisheries Products for Food Security, Coastal Livelihoods was hosted by India from 28-29 November 2019. The Third SYDP on Development and Management of Somalia's and Yemen's Marine Fisheries was hosted by Italy from 27 September to 01 October 2021 in Rome.

15.3 IORA Nelson Mandela Internship Programme (NMIP)

2018 marked the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela, the visionary Leader. To commemorate his birth, and to solidify the historical link IORA has with the global icon, South Africa has proposed to have a special programme: "The IORA-Nelson Mandela Be the Legacy Internship Programme" thus contributing to another of his visions: to change the world for the better. The said programme was launched during the 18th COM meeting held on 2 November 2018 in Durban, South Africa. This was further reiterated in the "Special Declaration on the Commemoration of the Centenary of the Birth of Nelson Mandela". The long-term objective of the Programme is to create a strong and growing base of young people in the Indian Ocean region that understand and support the need to safeguard an Indian Ocean that is safe, secure and develops sustainably. The first iteration of the programme commenced on 01 September 2022.

15.4 IORA Day

7th March marks IORA Day. Marking the official day, the annual event is aimed at enhancing the visibility and achievements of the Association.

15.5 IORA Gender Pledge on International Women's Day 2022

On the occasion of the International Women's Day 2022 celebrated on 08 March annually, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) released the IORA Gender Pledge. The pledge recognized that international practice for gender equality is to seek 40:40:20 women to men ratio, comprising at least 40 per cent women, 40 per cent men with 20 per cent being either women or men.

16. OBSERVERSHIP

16.1 United National General Assembly

IORA was granted Observer status at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) through Resolution A/RES/70/123 in December 2015. Two events were hosted by Indonesia and Seychelles in 2017 in the margins of flagship events at UNGA: (a) IORA side event on maritime co-operation of IORA along 3rd Prep Com Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) and Side event (Partnerships for Blue Economy – The Indian Ocean experience) to be hosted by Seychelles - UN Conference on Oceans; SDG 14 Implementation

16.2 African Union (AU)

On 9 November 2015, the former IORA Secretary General, Ambassador K. V. Bhagirath, presented his Letter of Credentials to the former African Union Commission Chairperson, H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, formalising IORA's observer status with the AU. A proposal for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between IORA and the AU was proposed, and it is in the process of being finalised for signature.

16.3 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

At its 61st session held on 26 September 2014, the Trade and Development Board approved the application by IORA for observer status with UNCTAD under rule 76 of the rules of procedure of the Board. IORA would be able to be represented and to participate in the Trade and Development Board meetings, as well as in the public intergovernmental meetings organised by UNCTAD.

17. MEMORANDUMS OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

To enhance the relationship between IORA and its Partners, Memorandums of Understanding have been concluded by the Association and institutions in areas of mutual interest under the six Priority and cross-cutting areas. MoUs in IORA are not legally binding.

The MOUs that have been signed to date included the following:

| NO. | MOU | DATE/VENUE |
|------------|---|---|
| 1. | Memorandum of Understanding between IORA and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) | 4 September 2023, Jakarta, Indonesia |
| 2. | Memorandum of Understanding between IORA and Intergovernmental | 14 March 2023, virtually |

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| | Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC of UNESCO) to strengthen partnership on ocean sciences | |
| 3. | Memorandum of Understanding between IORA and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) | 28 April 2022, virtually |
| 4. | Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and IORA | 17 March 2022, virtually |
| 5. | Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and IORA was signed at the 36th Ordinary Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Commission. | 23 February 2022, Paris, France |
| 6. | MoU between IORA and France through the French Development Agency (Agence Française de Développement) (AFD) for Strengthening the Capacities of IORA in promoting the Blue Economy and Fisheries Management | 9 March 2020, IORA Secretariat, Mauritius |
| 7. | MoU between IORA and the Centre for Science & Technology of the Non-aligned and other Developing Countries (NAM S&T Centre) on Application of Science, Technology & Innovation for Sustainable Development* | 7 November 2019, Abu Dhabi, UAE * MoU was renewed. The renewal of the MoU between IORA and NAM S&T Centre was signed in New Delhi on 29 September 2022. |
| 8. | MoU between IORA and Germany through the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) | 7 November 2019, Abu Dhabi, UAE *21 December 2020 - signature of the |

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|------------|--|---|
| | GmbH for Strengthening the capacities of IORA* | updated MOU that extends and expands the programme of cooperation between IORA and GIZ from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022. August 2022- signature of the extension of the existing MOU until March 2023. *The MOU has expired. |
| 9. | MoU between IORA and International Solar Alliance for Sustainable Development and Deployment of Solar Energy (ISA)* | 3 October 2018, New Delhi, India * MoU was extended. The extension to the MoU between IORA and ISA was signed remotely on August 2021. |
| 10. | MoU between the United Nations Institute for Training Research and IORA | December 2018, Remotely |
| 11. | MoU between IORA and Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) | 16 January 2018, New Delhi, India |
| 12. | MoU on a Collaborative Framework between IORA and the Non-Aligned Movement for South-South Technical Co-operation (NAM CSSTC) | 28 November 2017, Jakarta, Indonesia |
| 13. | MoU between the Governments of the Member States of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) for Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) | To date, nineteen (19) Member States have signed, namely Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, UAE, and Yemen |
| 14. | MoU between the Governments of the | To date, eighteen (18) Member States |

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| | Member States of the IORA for the Coordination and Co- operation of Search and Rescue Services in the Indian Ocean Region | have signed the MOU on Search and Rescue namely; Australia, Bangladesh, Union of Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Thailand |
| 15 | MoU for the Establishment of the IORA Fisheries Support Unit (FSU) in Oman | 15 November 2011 at the 11th COM, Bengaluru, India |
| 16. | MoU for the Establishment of the IORA Regional Centre for Science and Technology (RCSTT) in Iran | 23 June 2008 at the IORA Secretariat, Mauritius |

18. IORA Website & social media

The IORA Secretariat's website can be accessed at www.iora.int

- Social Media Platforms:
- Facebook: [IORAofficial](#)
- Twitter: [IORAofficial](#)
- Instagram: [IORAofficial](#)
- YouTube: [Indian Ocean Rim Association IORA](#)
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/indian-ocean-rim-association>